



### ***3.18 ROADLESS AREAS, WILDERNESS AREAS, AND WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS***

This section discusses the roadless and wilderness areas, as well as wild and scenic rivers in the vicinity of the Project Area. It also considers the effects to these resources associated with PALCO's proposed HCP/SYP, and Headwaters Reserve creation.

#### **3.18.1 Affected Environment**

##### **Roadless Areas**

PALCO lands contain 1,520 miles of roads, of which approximately 170 are paved. Roads are present in every watershed that contains PALCO lands. For an area to be considered roadless under the U.S. Forest Service definition, it generally must be 5,000 acres or larger and substantially undeveloped and natural. If the U.S. Forest Service classification of roadless areas was applied to PALCO lands, there would be no area of PALCO property that would meet the criteria of "roadless."

##### **Wilderness Areas**

There are no wilderness areas near PALCO lands. The Trinity Alps Wilderness, the closest wilderness to the area, is approximately 25 miles to the northeast.

##### **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

The Eel River passes next to PALCO lands between approximately Scotia and Whitlow. The river was designated as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System in 1981. Twelve miles of the river have been designated wild, 6 miles scenic, and 139 miles recreation river. The section of the Eel River near PALCO lands has been designated as recreation river. The Van Duzen River is also included in the

National Wild and Scenic River System. It flows through PALCO lands as it follows State Highway 36. The section of the Van Duzen River that flows through PALCO lands has been designated as a scenic river.

#### **3.18.2 Environmental Effects**

The effects of the alternatives on roadless areas, wilderness areas, and wild and scenic rivers in the Humboldt Area are analyzed in this section.

##### **Thresholds of Significance**

There are no regulatory or other thresholds related to roadless area size on private land.

##### **Roadless Areas (All Alternatives)**

As noted in Section 2.5.1, the evaluation of the No Action/No Project differs under CEQA and NEPA. For CEQA the No Action alternative is not projected into the long-term future. In the short term, the conformance with the FPRs, the federal and California ESAs, and other federal and state laws is determined on a THP and site specific basis. A wide variety of mitigation measures tailored to local conditions is applied with the purpose of avoiding significant environmental effects and take of listed species. Consequently, most significant environmental effects of individual THPs can be expected to be mitigated to a level of less than significant through implementation of the No Action/No Project alternative.

As noted in Section 2.5.1, the NEPA evaluation of the No Action alternative considers the implementation of wide, no-

harvest RMZs as well as restrictions on the harvest of old growth redwood forest to model conditions over the short and long term. Ranges of RMZs are considered qualitatively because it is expected that adequate buffer widths could vary as a result of varying conditions on PALCO lands.

Under Alternative 1, there would continue to be no roadless areas on PALCO lands or in the Headwaters Reserve. Under Alternatives 2, 2a, 3, and 4, the establishment of the Reserve would likely result in many roads being decommissioned and areas eventually becoming unroaded. Because in Alternatives 2, 2a, 3 and 4, some roads would be maintained to provide access throughout the Reserve, it is not clear if any portion of the Reserve would eventually meet the Forest Service's definition of roadless.

Alternative 4 would have the greatest opportunity of all the alternatives, for eventually having the largest amount of area without active roads. It can be assumed that the 63,673-acre Reserve would maintain some roads for administrative or public access. It can also be assumed that many existing roads would be decommissioned, thus potentially creating large areas without open roads.

#### **Wilderness Areas (All Alternatives)**

No wilderness areas that could be affected by the actions are found near the Headwaters Reserve. The Trinity Alps Wilderness is closest to the Reserve, and it is located approximately 25 miles to the northeast.

#### **Wild and Scenic Rivers (All Alternatives)**

Sections of the Eel and Van Duzen rivers are included in the National Wild and Scenic River System (see Section 3.18.1.1). The wild and scenic sections of the rivers have been given "Special Treatment Area" status by the CDF. As a result, lands within 200 feet of the rivers are given

special consideration by the Director of the CDF when reviewing harvest plans.

Varying types of harvest can occur within the special treatment area if in the opinion of the Director, harvest would be compatible with the objectives for which the Special Treatment Area was established. Harvest under all of the alternatives would be required to meet California FPRs regarding wild and scenic rivers and would, therefore, have no effect on the Recreation River status of the section of the Eel River that flows past PALCO lands or the Scenic River status of the section of the Van Duzen River that passes next to PALCO lands.

All of the alternatives would place harvest units that would be visible from some locations on the Eel and Van Duzen rivers. Most of the harvest units would be outside of the 200-foot area given special consideration by the CDF. Harvest could occur within 200 feet of the rivers, but the intensity and type of harvest would be determined by the Director of the CDF, who as stated above, would require harvest to be compatible with the intent of the National Wild and Scenic River System. The presence of harvest units inside and outside of the 200-foot consideration, special treatment area would be disturbing to some users. However, if the Director of the CDF required that harvest practices be compatible with the objectives of the special treatment areas, the qualities that led to the Eel and Van Duzen rivers being included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as recreation and scenic rivers would remain in tact.

#### **3.18.2.2 AB 1986 Conditions**

Under the HCP, either the Owl Creek or the Grizzly Creek MMCA would be available for harvest. AB 1986 conditions the expenditure of state funds for acquisition of the Headwaters Forest and other lands on the inclusion of several provisions in the final HCP, the IA, and the ITPs intended to strengthen protections for

covered species. Should PALCO include those provisions in the final HCP, state monies would be appropriated to the state Wildlife Conservation Board to fund the state's share of the cost of acquiring approximately 7,500 acres of private forest lands, including the Headwaters Forest. Under AB 1986, the Owl Creek MMCA would be protected from harvest for the life of the ITPs, and the Grizzly Creek MMCA would be protected for five years from the date of the adoption of the final HCP. AB 1986 also appropriates additional funding for the future opportunity to purchase Owl Creek. Any funds remaining from those appropriated for the purchase of the Owl Creek MMCA could be used to purchase tracts of the "Elk River Property" and previously unlogged Douglas-fir forest land within the Mattole River watershed.

The state managing agency and management prescriptions are unknown, and these acquisitions are somewhat speculative. Considering the legislative intent behind AB 1986, it is assumed that purchased lands would be managed similarly to the Headwaters Reserve. These anticipated acquisitions would protect old-growth and residual redwood stands and some Douglas-fir stands within these tracts in perpetuity.

The combined effect of land acquisition and additional protections on the landscape would slightly increase unroaded areas. There would be no effects on areas designated as Wilderness or Wild and Scenic Rivers.

### **3.18.3 Cumulative Effects**

Alternative 1 would not have any cumulative effect on roadless areas in Humboldt County because PALCO would continue to use most of the 1,400 miles of roads that exist on PALCO lands. There would be no opportunity to remove a significant amount of roads under this alternative. With Alternatives 2, 2a, 3, and

4, varying amounts of PALCO lands in the Reserve would have roads decommissioned. Areas that are currently roaded could become essentially roadless depending upon where and how many of the roads were decommissioned. The cumulative effect to roadless areas in Humboldt County would be an increase of some undetermined amount of roadless areas. Whether there would be enough area to meet the U.S. Forest Service criteria of roadless is uncertain at this time.

None of the alternatives would have any effect on wilderness areas because the closest wilderness area is approximately 25 miles away.

Harvest activities with all alternatives would be required to follow California FPRs. By doing so, harvest would not compromise the outstandingly remarkable values that led to portions of the Eel and Van Duzen Rivers in the project area being designated as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System. New harvest activity would be observable from portions of the two rivers with all alternatives. This would potentially be disturbing to some viewers. However, because the remarkable values of the rivers would be maintained (by complying with California FPRs), there would be no cumulative negative effect on wild and scenic rivers in Humboldt County.

### **3.18.4 Mitigation**

Because there are no significant effects to roadless and wilderness areas, as well as wild and scenic rivers, no additional mitigation is required.